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AUTHOR Fabert, Barbara; Homlish, Kathleen
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ABSTRACT

Educational indicators or quality indicators are described. Many states are already using statewide indicators to assess school improvements and the impact of educational reforms. Indicators can basically be defined as statistics that assess desired outcomes, document improvements, and describe characteristics of educational systems. One successful district model for indicators found in east central Kansas is examined. The guiding principles for the Project for Determining the Quality of Schools (PDQS) are drawn from the research-supported characteristics of rural school improvement programs. The design and implementation phases of the project incorporated activities common to effective school improvement programs, that is, commitment and support, information dissemination, development of assessment instruments, data retrieval, data analysis and interpretation, and improvement plans focused on school/district goals. There have been significant improvements in student achievement, instructional variables, leadership characteristics, and school climate factors over the 3 years that the PDQS has been implemented. Appended are eight figures and outcomes accreditation. (10 references) (SI)

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ASSESSING THE HEALTH OF SCHOOLS -- EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS AND OUTCOMES ACCREDITATION

Barbara Fabert
Director, Field Services
Jones Institute for Educational Excellence
Emporia State University
Emporia, Kansas

Kathleen Homlish
Coordinator, Teacher Education, Accreditation
and Staff Development
Kansas State Department of Education
Topeka, Kansas

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EDUCATIONAL/QUALITY INDICATORS

There's a new wrinkle in school improvement called the educational indicator or quality indicator. Educational indicators first gained national recognition in November of 1984, when the Council of Chief State School Officers initiated a policy to establish a "national system of standardized indicators" and have since created a center to implement their policy (Kaagan and Smith, 1985; Smith, 1988). Many states are already using state-wide indicators to assess school improvements and the impact of educational reforms (Selden, 1987, 1988). Likewise, school districts are measuring their own effectiveness and efficiency with school-specific indicators (David, 1988). Indicators can basically be defined as statistics that assess desired outcomes, document improvements, and describe characteristics of educational systems (Kaagan and Smith, 1985; Smith, 1988). Indicators have a lot of potential value.

If they can capture what goes on in classrooms and if they are used by district policy makers who are committed to school improvement, indicators are potentially constructive. But if they cannot capture the quality of instructional practices and if they do not affect local planning and policy making, indicators can be destructive.

David, 1988

In addition to being used strictly for policy development and school improvement, educational/quality indicators play a significant role for rural schools.

With few exceptions, these schools are facing declining enrollments, increasing costs, and legislated spending limits. In a public school system where numbers are necessary for quality and cost effectiveness, these school systems are finding it increasingly difficult to operate a program which meets existing quality standards.

Nachtigal, 1982

Indicators are relevant "tools" for helping small schools:

1. know what they are doing,
2. focus on educational ends and not means,
3. use appropriate feedback and accountability systems, and

4. manage their own diagnostic self-assessments.

In fact, rural school districts have certain advantages in being able to successfully use and benefit from indicators. Because of the size of rural school districts, it is easier to implement and manage indicators. As a result, there are more opportunities for local ownership of indicators because teachers, administrators, and school board members can be directly involved in the process of identifying the indicators most related to their schools. In smaller districts and schools, data for indicators can more accurately be collected, analyzed and reported.

District-level commitment to indicators is likely to be greater in smaller school districts because district leaders feel more community pressure to improve schools than their counterparts in large urban districts. District leaders can actually document improvements with an indicators system and communicate such improvements to their respective communities.¹ School board members then understand and see results of their actions as policy makers. Because "...indicators seem likely not only to monitor educational practice but also to influence it" (Porter, 1988, p. 507), rural schools have an appropriate mechanism for causing educational changes in environments where changes are often viewed with suspicion. Lastly, indicators systems are collaborative and cost-effective models of self-assessment for districts where human and financial resources are limited.

A SUCCESSFUL DISTRICT MODEL FOR INDICATORS

In response to a request by a rural consortium¹ of seventeen school districts in the sparsely populated area of east central Kansas to study the educational effectiveness of their high schools, an assessment model was patterned after the recommendations of the Council of Chief State School Officers, and exemplary quality indicator programs.

Because of the limited financial and human resources available to the small schools in the consortium, the superintendents wanted a collaborative and cost-effective model for high schools to assume ownership and leadership for assessing their own effectiveness.

The guiding principles for the Project for Determining the Quality of Schools (PDQS) were drawn from the research supported characteristics of rural school improvement programs

(Nachtigal, 1985):

1. The project should address problems that have been identified and are perceived as important to the local constituents.
2. The project should offer improvement strategies which have a definite "home grown" approach.
3. The project should provide on-site technical assistance, support, and a communication network for client ownership.
4. The project should allow local leadership a major role in deciding what and how the project would provide assistance.
5. The project should guide all involved schools to work together cooperatively to increase moral support, share resources, and reduce isolation and costs.

District administrators wanted a comprehensive and descriptive profile of each high school which could serve as a planning document for future school improvements. After a review of the current literature and programs/projects focusing on educational quality indicators, the goals of the Project were delineated with input from the superintendents of each district in the consortium. A concept paper outlining the Project's outcomes, rationale, phases, budget options, timelines, and activities was presented to consortium. The stated goals of the Project were to:

1. collect, analyze, and profile qualitative and quantitative school level data (Figure A).
2. provide individual schools and districts with comprehensive profiles of variables related to educational effectiveness.
3. assist each school and district in using profiles to target school and district plans to meet goals.
4. guide schools and districts in the use of a continuous self-assessment process to monitor their own goals, educational effectiveness, and improvements.

The PDQS profiles were intended to offer each high school a framework for decisions involving priorities in the use of human and fiscal resources. By providing schools with appropriate information about their performances, real and perceived strengths and needs, and client satisfaction, schools would better be able to make decisions about what specifically needed improvement and how to implement the improvements. The PDQS was developed as a diagnostic self-assessment process for each district and a systematic review of the high schools withing each district. The outcomes of the PDQS were not intended to tell schools what they

should be doing, but rather indicate to schools what they are doing. An individual high school would not be compared with a model of an ideal high school. Schools would be provided with efficiently tabulated and meaningfully profiled data to assist them in determining where improvements could be made.

The design and implementation phases of the Project incorporated activities common to effective school improvement programs, i.e., commitment and support, information dissemination, development of assessment instruments, data retrieval, data analysis and interpretation, and improvement plans focused on school/district goals.

The success of the Project is not attributable to the replication and adoption of activities of other proven successful programs, but to the active leadership role of the Project's steering committee. In order to provide opportunities for local level input, on-site support and communication, and, most importantly, ownership of the Project, each participating district was requested to elect, select, or volunteer one representative to serve on the PDQS steering committee. The steering committee has averaged between 20-25 people over the three years. Three guidelines governed the creation of the committee: 1) administrators and staff would have release time to attend committee meetings, 2) the committee would be a manageable size so as to allow active participation on the part of all members, and 3) composition of the committee would reflect all significant "players" impacted by the Project, i.e., school board members, administrators, staff, and parents.

The steering committee has proven to be a vital communicative link between the Project and local level participants. Information has been disseminated to schools, teachers, and parents via steering committee members who meet on a regular basis with school boards, and school staffs, or post notices on school bulletin boards. When and where there are local concerns and frustrations, steering committee members communicate these concerns to Project staff with a phone call, written communique, or personal visit. A resource exchange was not an intended outcome of the steering committee, but naturally developed as committee members shared articles and research with the Project staff and vice versa. Over time, the steering committee has become

a cooperative, unified, and interactive group which is critical to the success of the Project in providing client ownership, leadership, mutual moral support, and on-site assistance.

One of the first tasks for the steering committee was the identification and operational definition of a set of quality school indicators. The steering committee initially examined a list of potential indicators suggested by a review of the literature. Each indicator was discussed in terms of feasibility for data retrieval, usefulness in providing qualitative or quantitative information, and relevance in measuring appropriate school and/or district performance variables. Steering committee members agreed upon discrete quality indicators and categorized them in general data domains (Figure B). Data sources included students, parents of students currently enrolled, school/district administrators, and district/school reports, records and documents. Three separate surveys for parents, students, and staff were designed by the committee to collect qualitative data. A data retrieval booklet was created for recording quantitative data. The data collection instruments were field tested and subsequently edited by the committee.

Another major task of the steering committee was to determine how collected data on individual quality indicators could best be visually represented in a series of school profiles. A comparative analysis of across school data on each indicator was presented in the profiles, but specific schools/districts were not identified. The profiles were organized according to the general data domains for the quality indicators. The last section of each profile report included a planning document for school/district goal setting. Figure C is an example of profiled qualitative data (parent communication network indicator) and Figure D illustrates profiled quantitative data (graduate data indicator).

IMPACT OF A DISTRICT INDICATORS MODEL

This is for us the first relevant and important project for telling us about ourselves. Now we know for sure what we are doing, how we can plan, what definitely needs changing, and why we should be motivated to do things differently. It has caused all of us involved in education in the district to talk about, focus on, and relate to the same

things for once. We're all finally heading in the same direction because we see the need to be there.

Superintendent involved in PDQS, 1987

The PDQS has provided rural school districts with comprehensive information and diagnostic data about themselves. During the growing era of staff, administrative, and school board accountability, the Project to Determine the Quality of Schools is a valuable and successful self-assessment process to help small schools in prioritizing, communicating, and measuring school improvements. The PDQS model is unique in that it provides rural schools with the necessary skill to assume leadership for their own evaluations and improvements. As a continuous and planned process of self-renewal, the indicators model has united teachers, parents, administrators, and school board members of isolated areas in constructive efforts and dialogues to cause improvements to better serve their students.

There have been significant improvements in student achievement (Figure E), instructional variables (Figure F), leadership characteristics (Figure G), and school climate factors (Figure H) over the three years that the PDQS has been implemented. The PDQS can not take credit for *causing* such improvements. The most important thing is that the PDQS has provided a way for small rural districts to document improvements over time and to relate improvements to specific school and district goals. Rural schools have been responsible for and successful at managing their own progress because of educational indicators.

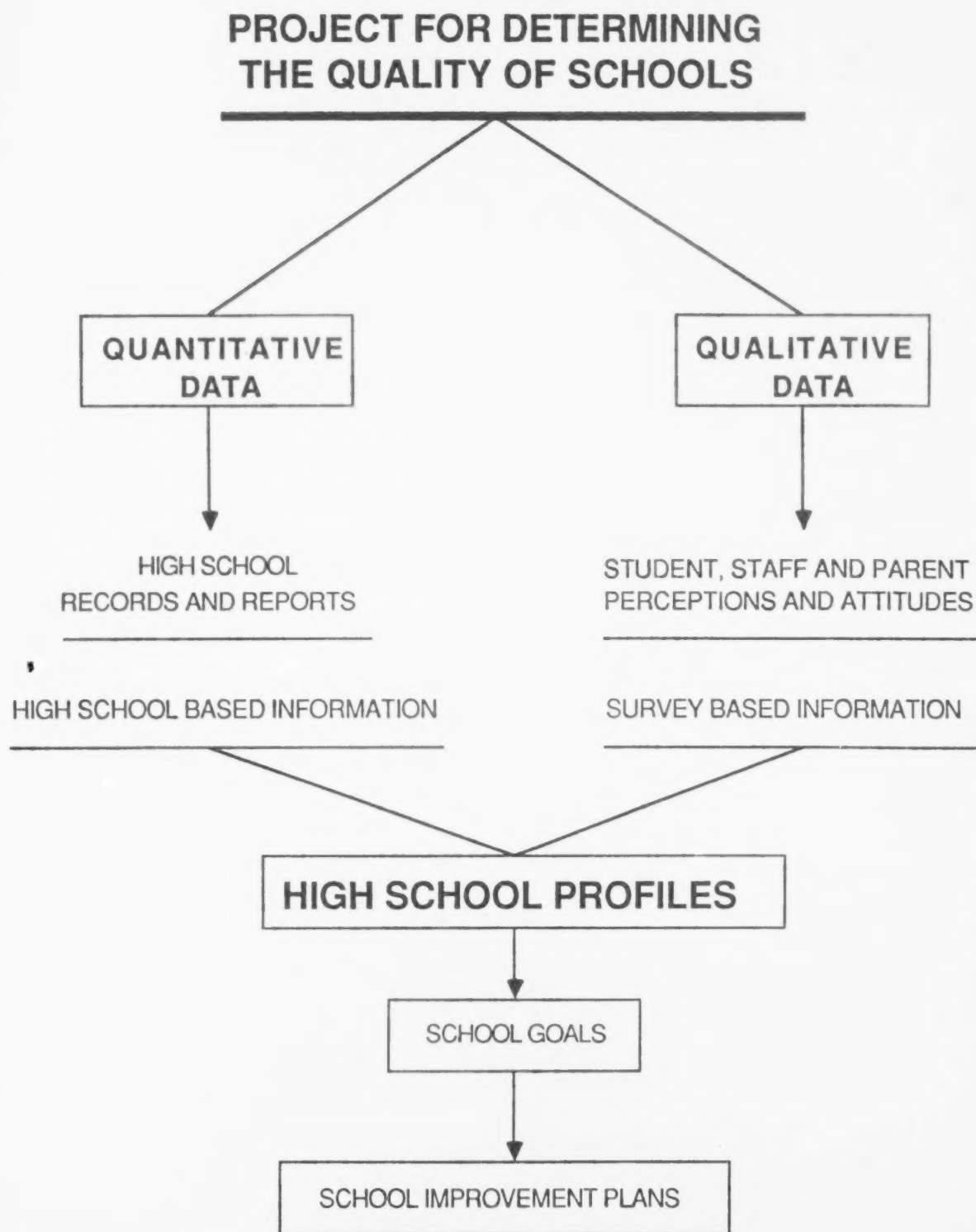
FOOTNOTE

¹The Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association (FHERDA) is a consortium which has been in existence for over twenty years as a university-public school partnership with The Teachers College at Emporia State University. Average enrollments across the FHERDA districts range from 380 to 2,135 students.

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FIGURE A



Project for Determining the Quality of Schools PDQS

Data Domain

	INSTRUCTIONAL PROFICIENCY	PARENTAL SUPPORT	SCHOOL CLIMATE
STUDENTS	*ACHIEVEMENT SCORES *HOMEWORK POLICY *ESSAYS AND COMPOSITIONS *TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK	*ADMINISTRATOR/TEACHER EXPECTATIONS *SATISFACTION WITH INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM	*STUDENT/SCHOOL MANAGEMENT *DISCIPLINE *SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT *STUDENT ABSENTEEISM POLICY *SUBSTANCE ABUSE *EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
PARENTS	*HOMEWORK POLICY *TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK	*COMMUNICATION NETWORK *ADMINISTRATOR/TEACHER EXPECTATIONS *SATISFACTION WITH INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM	*STUDENT/SCHOOL MANAGEMENT *DISCIPLINE *SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT *STUDENT ABSENTEEISM POLICY *SUBSTANCE ABUSE *EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
STAFF	*HOMEWORK POLICY *WRITING ASSIGNMENTS *TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK		*STAFF ABSENTEEISM POLICY *DISCIPLINE *SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT *STUDENT ABSENTEEISM POLICY *SUBSTANCE ABUSE *STAFF DEVELOPMENT
SCHOOL	*HOMEWORK POLICY *COURSE ENROLLMENTS *RECOMMENDED GRADUATION PROFILE *GRADUATE DATA		*DISCIPLINE POLICY *BUILDING/DISTRICT GOALS *STAFF ABSENTEEISM FIGURES *VANDALISM

FIGURE B

9.

FIGURE C

SAMPLE PROFILE FOR PARENT SURVEY ITEM

I AM SATISFIED WITH MY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL
ACTIVITIES.

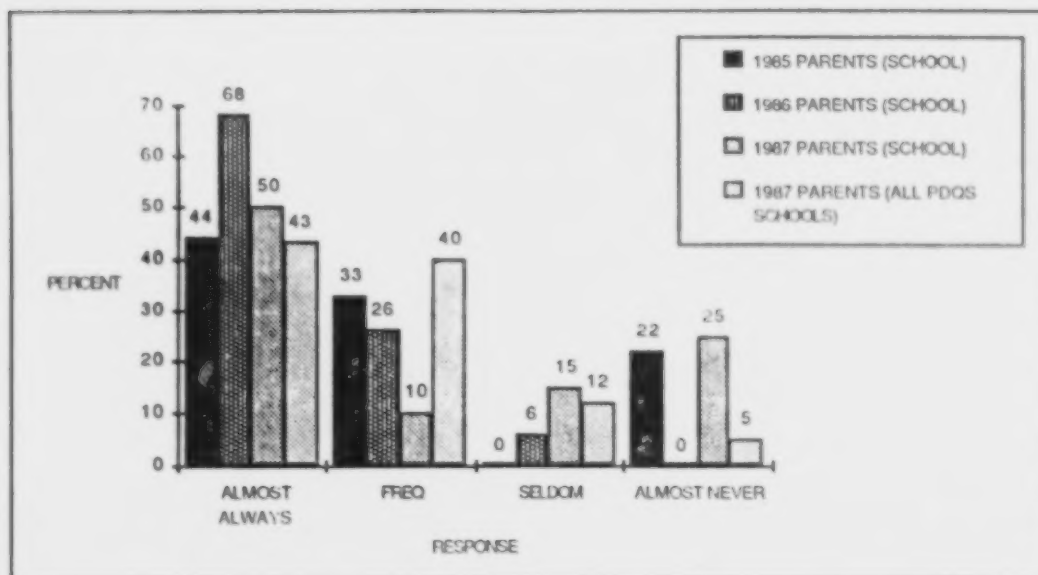


FIGURE D

**1985-1987 ACT DATA
ENGLISH SCORES
SCHOOL**

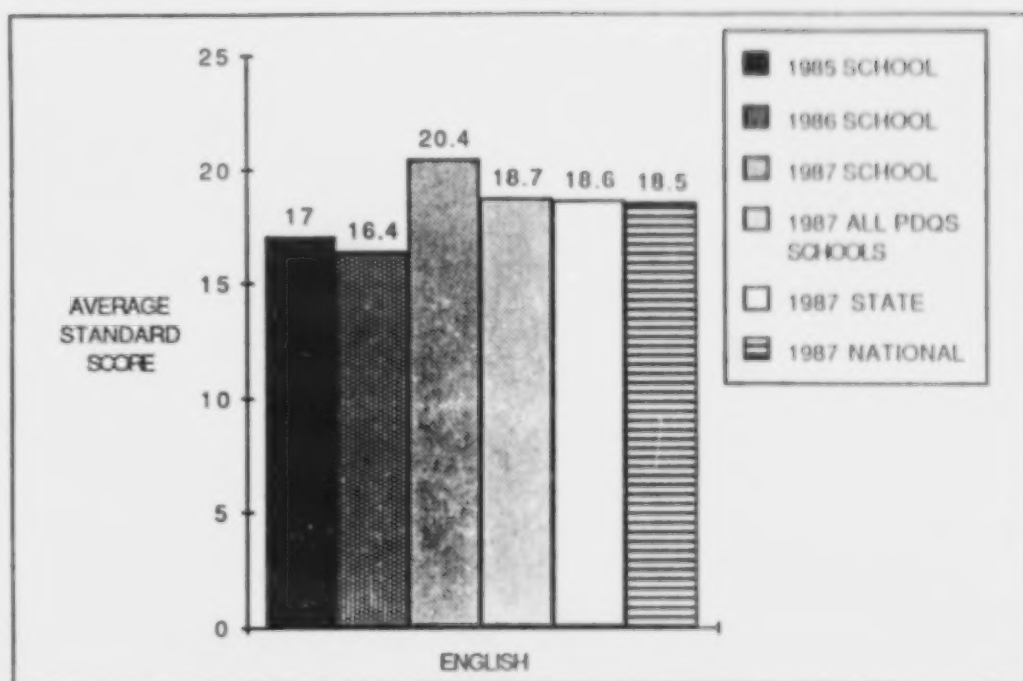


FIGURE E

1985-1987 ACT DATA ALL PDQS SCHOOLS

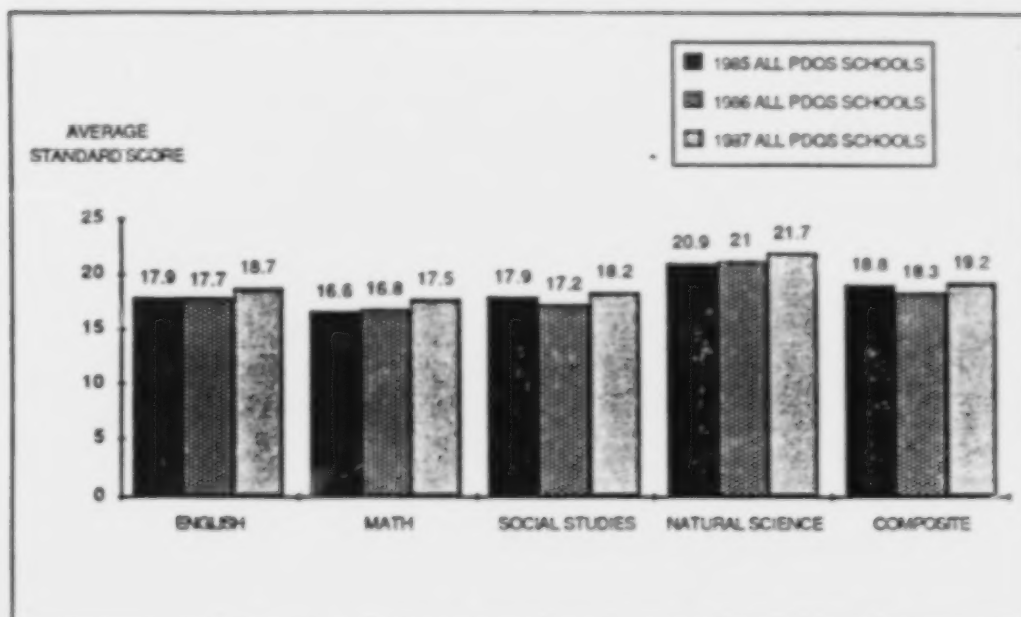


FIGURE F

ANALYSIS OF CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGES

GRADUATES OF 1986 AND 1987

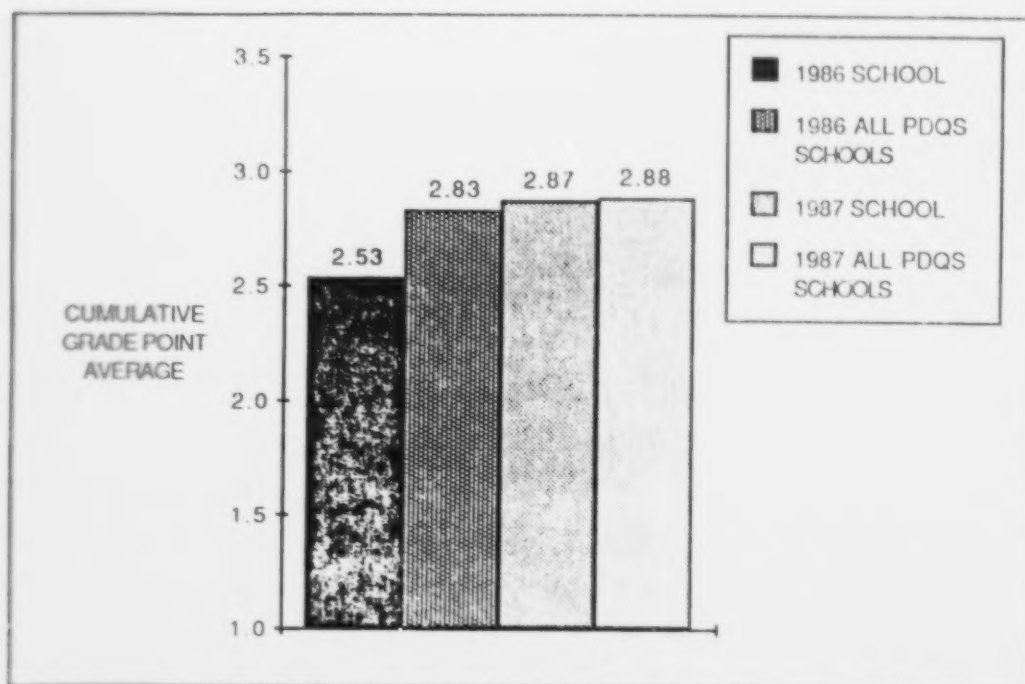


FIGURE G

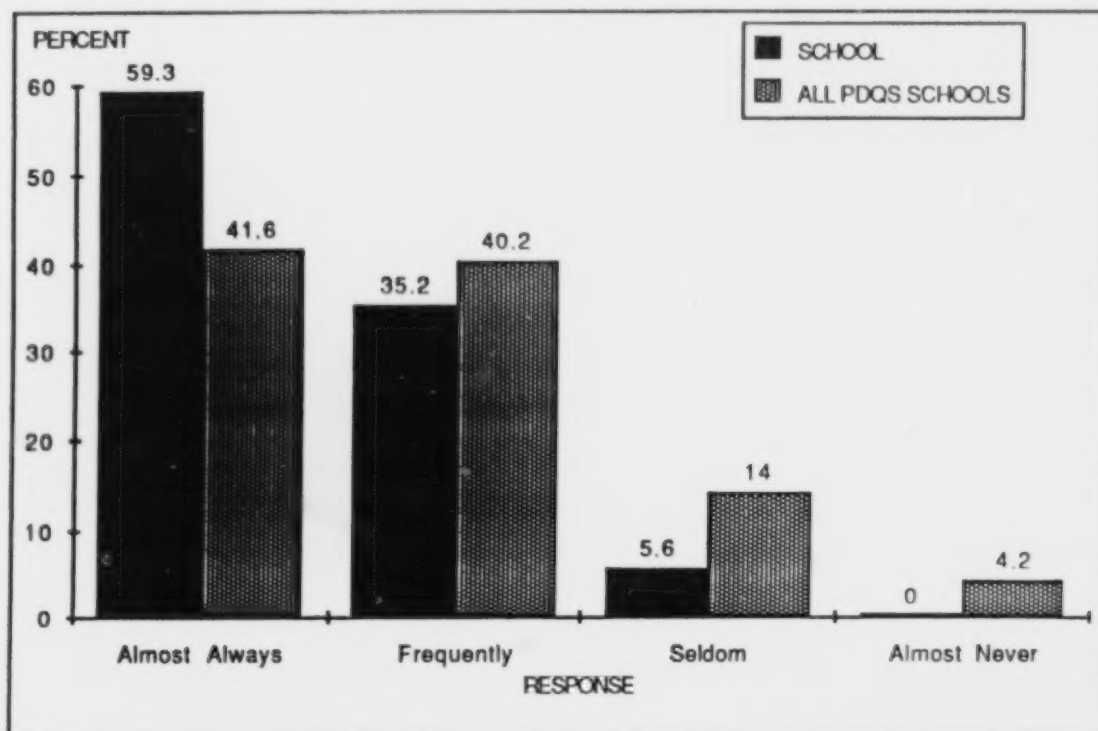
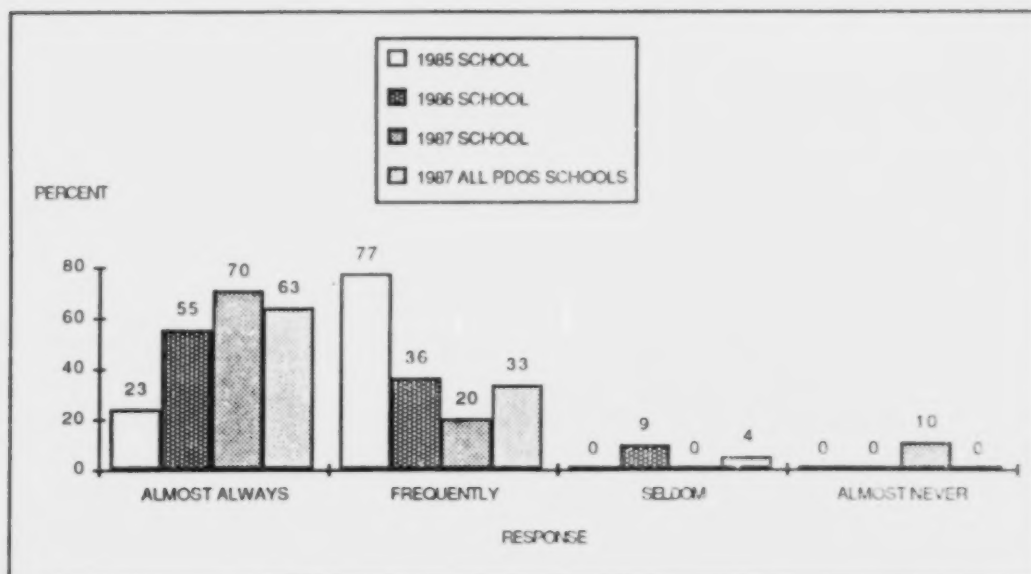
MY PRINCIPAL HAS PURPOSES AND GOALS FOR THE SCHOOL.**Student Survey**

FIGURE H

SAMPLE PROFILE FOR STAFF SURVEY ITEM

**IS THE SCHOOL CLIMATE CONDUCIVE TO TEACHING AND
LEARNING?**



OUTCOMES ACCREDITATION

State boards of education and state departments of education are increasingly being asked to provide information relative to the effects of education reforms in their states. State legislators, the public and education stockholders are asking for accountability mechanisms to guide, direct, measure and evaluate the impact of education reform.

Outcomes accreditation/evaluation systems and the considerations surrounding them pose a set of policy issues that deserve the attention of the State Board of Education as it designs and guides the quality of education in the State of Kansas.

The purpose of this report is to summarize what is known about outcomes accreditation/evaluation systems, some examples of current outcomes models and considerations surrounding implementation of a redesigned model for state accreditation.

Outcome-based models of accreditation/evaluation are designed to:

- ° reflect the health and efficiency of an educational system and to point the way toward its improvement,
- ° profile the district, the total school and/or specific programs,
- ° focus on goals targeted to study,
- ° implement improvement strategies, and
- ° document improvement changes in the school.

In designing a state system for outcomes accreditation/evaluation assessment, several guiding principles can be identified (Cohen, Phi Delta Kappan, April, 1988):

- ° A state assessment system should focus primarily on individual schools. The research emphasizes the importance of the individual school as the unit of educational improvement. This implies that the school should be the primary level at which data are reported and that the reports should be designed to be useful to school-level decision makers.
- ° State assessment should not be limited to students' academic performance. This system should reflect the long-range educational goals of the state, the effects of statewide reform initiatives, the knowledge base relative to effective schools and school improvement, and the public perceptions of important schooling practices and outcomes.
- ° State systems should rely on multiple measurements and data collection strategies. Mix of test results, school records, surveys, observations, and interviews will be required. It is generally believed that the state should bear the costs of collecting such data.

- ° State systems should be adaptive, continuously evolving over time. The content, structure, and operational procedures of state assessment systems should be modified in response to changing state education goals, changes in effective practices, and natural shifts in the attention of state-level policy makers.

These principles are probably applicable in redesigning a state accreditation system. Specific resources are also necessary to support effective implementation of any outcomes accreditation model.

- ° Staff development programs that provide on-going continuous assistance and support for both principals and teachers are needed;
- ° Monetary resources that are adequate to provide the people, materials, and time needed to implement the outcomes system must be insured.

The focus on outcomes is seen in a variety of projects currently underway in Kansas. The Project for Determining Quality Schools (PDQS) was initiated by Emporia State University's College of Education in the fall of 1985. The 17 participating school districts are members of a university/public school district consortium titled the Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association (FHERDA). Implemented for the last three years in the 21 high schools and 33 upper elementary schools of FHERDA, the Project's goal is to provide each district with a diagnostic self-assessment process for systematically reviewing its schools in order to guide the district and its schools in identifying educational strengths and needs. Through each district's self-assessment process, data and opinions are collected to determine how the schools are performing and how that performance is perceived by those served by the schools. The outcomes of the PDQS study are intended to tell schools what they are doing and to offer substantial data for districts and schools to make decisions about what specifically needs improvement.

The Project is a continuous and planned process of self-renewal that unites teachers, parents, administrators, and school board members in constructive efforts and dialogues to improve their schools' and districts' capabilities to better serve students. By building an information system at the school and district level(s), local constituents have a relevant and accessible knowledge base for improving their schools.

Another outcomes model comes to our attention through the North Central Association (NCA) - Commission on Schools. The NCA Outcomes Accreditation/Evaluation (OA/E) approach provides the school with information and insights concerning the extent to which it is achieving specific learning outcomes it has established for itself.

The NCA-OA/E process requires that a minimum of five cognitive target areas and two affective target areas be identified as a basis for the self-study. The specific areas are determined by the school-based steering committee.

The following summarizes the major phases of the NCA-Outcomes Accreditation/Evaluation process:

Profiling the Total School

- ° Gathering information about the school and the community
- ° Confirming the school's statement of philosophy and goals
- ° Identifying program objectives

Focusing on the Goals Targeted for Study

- ° Selecting target goals for study
- ° Hosting visits by the resource team
- ° Gathering baseline data regarding current levels of student performance
- ° Identifying subgroupings of students to be used in tracing changes in student performance

Implementing Improvement Strategies

- ° Developing and effecting plans for reducing discrepancies between current and desired student performance

Documenting Improvement Changes in the School

- ° Participating in the OA/E documentation cycle
- ° Participating in the NCA monitoring of the OA/E school (review panel visit)

Two Kansas high schools (Iola and Junction City) are in the process of completing the NCA Outcomes documentation cycle and are scheduled to host Review Panels during the 1988-1989 school year. Several other secondary and elementary schools have expressed interest in pursuing the NCA Outcomes Accreditation Evaluation process.

The Governor's Public School Advisory Council-The Committee on Accountability recommended to the Governor that the State Board of Education establish a task force to study the concept and implications of an outcome-based accreditation system and that the task force be funded by the executive and/or legislative branch of the state government.

A recent report from the Committee on Accountability, June, 1988, recommends to the Governor that consideration be given to:

1. State accreditation of public school districts based on outcomes rather than on mandated programs, input or counting.
2. Developing the idea that districts are to be held accountable for outcomes and that a high school diploma should indicate a level of competency.
3. Shifting responsibility for outcomes from the state level to the local level, along with the necessary authority to make local decisions.

4. Reallocation of the state department's limited resources to provide assistance in service rather than being forced to focus on compliance checks.

Implementation of a statewide system for outcomes accreditation should include the following considerations:

- ° Support of the State Board of Education to jointly design, plan, and implement an outcomes model that would involve all concerned parties - teachers, administrators, parents and community.
- ° Need for long-term and systematic planning, development, and implementation.
- ° Support for integrating and coordinating the outcomes system with the building and district school improvement effort.
- ° Analysis of current input and process systems to be retained in an outcomes model.
- ° Outcomes indicators to be included in a new accreditation model.
- ° Groups to be involved in the selection of outcome indicators.
- ° Decisions on reporting the results of outcomes.
- ° Identification of specific outcomes to be used for state accreditation.

These considerations would have to be dealt with prior to implementation. Further, the whole area of adequate resources necessary for implementation at the state level as well as the local district level needs to be explored.

There are a number of possible implementation strategies to be explored in adopting an outcomes accreditation redesigned system.

- ° The State Board of Education could initiate an outcomes accreditation model for districts wishing to pilot an exemplary accreditation model.
- ° The State could provide encouragement and support for local experimentation of an outcomes model.
- ° The State could develop general guidelines and suggestions for effectively developing and implementing an outcomes system.
- ° The State could encourage and support systematic evaluation of local district outcomes accreditation models and disseminate successful practices/models to other districts, thus building the capacity statewide for a process supporting educational excellence.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the information about the results of the outcomes accreditation/evaluation systems, perhaps the following generalizations could be made:

What We Know About the Outcomes Accreditation Evaluation Models

- ° That these systems are receiving increased attention from educators, policy makers and citizens
- ° That focused indicators provide useful information to inform and guide school improvement
- ° That focused indicators have the potential to guide state policy in education reform
- ° That an outcomes system will increase public accountability for and foster improvement in educational quality

What We Anticipate Will be True of An Outcomes Accreditation System

- ° That an outcomes accreditation model that incorporates input, process and outcome variables will be more useful than one that emphasizes only inputs
- ° That accreditation systems that recognize the connection between accreditation/evaluation and school improvement are more effective than only accreditation compliance checks
- ° That an accreditation system that supports local school district development and implementation will foster growth and support for quality education

Implications and Recommendations

- ° That an Outcomes Accreditation task force be established by the State Board of Education to study outcomes accreditation to include considerations identified in this paper as well as the current state accreditation cycle.
- ° That the task force be broadly representative of educators, education policy makers, and the community.
- ° That the State Board of Education establish a schedule of reporting from the task force.
- ° That the final report include consideration of the impact of a redesigned accreditation system on local school districts and the State Department of Education.